

PROMETHIA



2005-2006

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Promethia 2005-2006



Peter Jefferis

From the Editor

Few people deny the power of words. A speech designed to inspire soldiers or athletes, a poem composed to convey emotion, and a story composed to express truth are all woven of a common thread, and in one of the mysteries of humanity the words become flesh. The ethereal becomes objectified, the unknowable and inscrutable become accessible, and the mythical is made relatable. The crafted object made up of a host of symbols that correspond to an oral language seems to be product of some alchemist's formula, making gold from lead. The commonplace behaviors of man, the recalled pictures of man's surroundings, the events, the impulses, the thoughts all recorded on paper, stone, tablet, or in electronic binary code, are the dense and inexpensive base with which the alchemist stocks his furnace. The alchemist burns them down, leaving the noble metal glowing pure, until he pulls the burning precious treasure from the mouth of his godlike soul. Or so it seems.

But a writer is no alchemist. A writer is no magician. Yet aspiring writers often treat the craft in just such a way. Without waiting to acquire technique, without pausing to receive sound principles of style, without the patience to build a foundation of influences, would-be writers let their sentiments percolate in their furnace souls until they imagine the alchemy has run its course. They let a yellowish brine of abstraction and sentimentality gush onto a page.

The making of literature is no magical event. It is hard and long, full of mental and physical exhaustion. Writing is a craft, and like a craftsman,

a writer must have served an apprenticeship. The writer must have studied his predecessors; he must have learned as the technician learns before he can practice like the artist practices.

The most common advice that can be given to aspiring writers is to read. If a poet, read poetry. One should read twenty poems for every one written. Short stories should be read at an even higher clip. Novels should be read at a ratio of a hundred to every one written.

And when a reader has calluses on his eyes, he may take up his implement and haltingly write the first lines of his sonnet, the first paragraphs of his short story, the first pages of his novel.

He must then resist the temptation to rest and display his skill to those impressed that he could string together ten words. He must find critics, coconspirators. He must have his work beaten, and cut, and nailed up by peers and (more beneficially) masters. The spur to improve, after all, is no insult; instead, it is a statement of faith, an investment in potential. When his work is resurrected, standing strong, and clean, and vital he will be thankful.

I am not so qualified to preach. I am young. I have written only a little and only with marginal success. But I have learned that whatever magic is in writing is in the discipline, self-denial, and perseverance of the writer. The faithful writer, a craftsman—exacting, patient, skillful, studied—will know that his duty is to form an object of his words valuable to anyone willing to observe it.

Roger Buswell
Promethia 2005-2006 Editor

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Geese, Night and Day

Weltha Wood

Night

Last night just at sunset I walked outside as you flew past.
For a moment, your round bodies gleamed like soft silver bullets tracing through the dark,
And then against the pink sky, your long straight necks became arrows pointed at a target toward which you were impelled and which I could not see.
Where were you going? What took you there?
And for that matter, where am I going, and who takes me there?

Day

Today I halted at a break in the hedge to watch with reverence as across the stream and beyond, you strode in procession up the side of the hill.
It is not often that I am permitted to lift my eyes to look upon a flock of kings, who so casually visit and traverse their realm, looking down at the earth for the banquet spread before them, Or perhaps for the pearls of great price among the dirt and the grass.

One of you lifts his head up high and with a monarch's voice, calls to his fellow and to me.
Small sovereigns, you are mistaken for noisy pests,
But which among my kind has ears that can interpret you,
To bow in reverence before the prayers you utter,
To be blessed by your insistent benediction,
And to hear your homilies which might heal our hearts?

For Mary (For Flannery O'Connor)

Keith Gogan

Mary, Mary
Quite contrary, you
Wrote not with a pen
But with a sword
Our Lord leaping out of pages
Dripping with Southern sin
Pigs and peacocks and ham hocks
And deranged souls smacked by
Comeuppances
Your eyes
Your eyes, Mary
Saw the sickness and dared to call it out
To open the blinds and the blinded
To a better destiny shining
Like the sun rising
On a Georgia morning in 1953

The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit

Kingston Jones

The summer of my thirteenth year
The year of our Lord
Like every other year
A year of belief
Of birth

Of burnt pavement with my father
Among old friends
New for me
Routes and highway markers
State lines writing verses into my birth

Birth was deep reds then feeding
Now my father's wheel added color and shape
Between lines of linear

God's spirit was yellow on my face
Steady teaching through the passenger side window
He used roads to change my growth
He took my father's heart and made it a door



Shaun Horst

An Artifact of Childhood

Roger Buswell

My uncle rented the canoe and took his wife up the stream that fed into the wide lake. The family lived in cabins on the shore for a week one summer when I was very young. My uncle gave up on the canoe after one trip. Paddling against the current was just too hard. He came down one evening, his wife sitting behind him in her bright orange life vest. The sun glowed in the west, and their bare arms bronzed the color of the ripples lapping the shore, a burning ancient gold. To me they were as old as stone and wiser than the sky, but their faces were relieved and tired, and the canoe sat in the spot they dragged it for the rest of the week. The family chuckled about the rental canoe, until my aunt got herself stuck two hundred yards out from shore on a rented windsail.

Dad wasn't there. Dad was a thousand and a half miles to the south and west. Dad and Mom were in the early stages of hating each other, and Mom brought my brother and me to Minnesota to reunite with her family in a complex of cabins, thick trees, and cold water. I've seen photos of my father standing among my uncles, taller than all three by a full head, smiling in ski clothes on the side of a Colorado mountain. In Minnesota, my thoughts were an acre lost in the North American Continent. Dad couldn't fit in that crowded acre of Mom's brothers, and sister, and father, and the brood already growing around that vigorous young family. He was cut off so completely as to be absent from my thoughts. To attach him was like an imperfect union of bones in a joint, mental effort forcing ball into socket.

On the road to Minnesota, Mom stopped the car on the shoulder and threw my toy rifle off into the

formless gray air. I had smuggled my pride and joy into the car after it was forbidden. The sentence, however, was carried out on the rifle, not me, and not Dad. My young heart was sore, for the rifle would sit in that field forever. I was making a person from my gun. He saw us drive away, and I imagined his hopelessness, his utter despair, his wordless terror, at the shrinking automobile, at losing his family and his little boy.

The afternoon in the trees around the lake dozed in languid light. The trees and bare clouds filtered the sun into a gentle haze. Sound was hushed under the blanket of moist air so that steps on the carpet of needles and leaves resembled a dry, sweeping sound. The children were ordered down for a nap, and I was escorted into my room. My light-sleeping mother lay down on the couch, effectively guarding the door. But afternoons on the lake were not meant to be spent sleeping. Thirty minutes later my window sat open, the broken screen placed to the side. And I was nowhere.

When I popped out of the brush at one of the other cabins, inquiries were made at the troubling phenomenon of an unsupervised cousin appearing from the very wilderness. When questioned on the nature and origin of my freedom, I expressed a similar astonishment.

"Hey Rog," said Uncle Brent, "Where's your mom?"
Shrugged shoulders.

"What are you doing out all alone?"

More shrugged shoulders and an obscure gesture toward the woods.

"Does anyone know you're out here?"

Uncle Brent's absurd question was answered by a childish sardonic finger pointed back at him.

"Okay, we'd better go back to your cabin," said Uncle Brent. There was nothing to be done.

The lake breathed in short waves on the pebble-

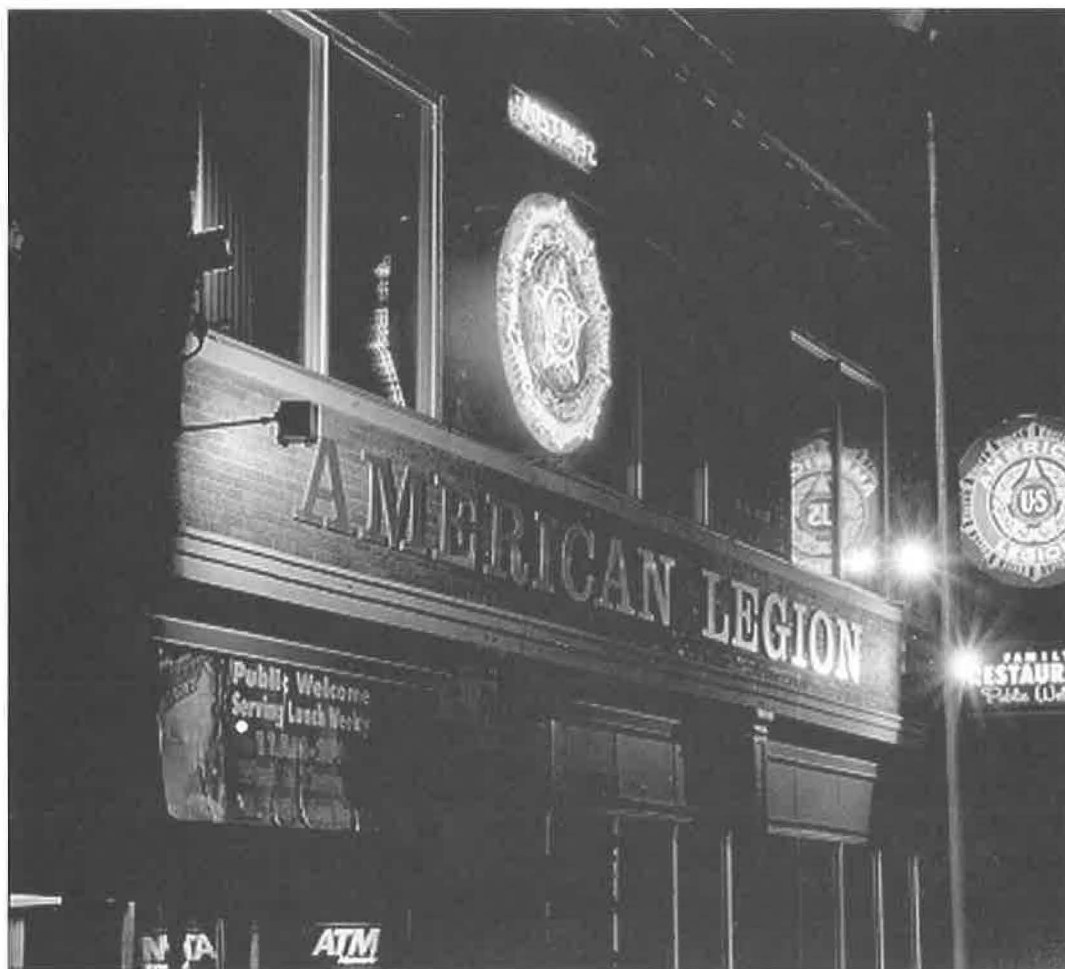
encrusted beach. The morning water hid itself in a mist, the night air condensing in wispy fingers over the cold water. To enter by increments, acclimating steadily to the temperature, might have been wiser, but boys prefer to live on the edge of a knife, driving headlong into the waves, greeted by an explosive pain, an ecstasy of discomfort, a nirvana of numbness. Blue swim trunks and ivory torsos flailing in loops and arches of pale green water, my brother, my cousins and I screamed and laughed at our folly. Then shivering with chattering teeth and purple lips, wrapped in wet beach towels, we would sit recovering on the picnic table, preparing to make another futile assault on the fortress lake.

Once, Mom stationed herself on the end of a dock. We, playfully violent as we were, charged her. The only thing to do with an authority figure trapped at the end of a dock is to charge. And Mother, with some mysterious adult speed, evaded us, taking us by our arms and launching us impossibly high. We spun like rifles on the highway, striking the water in comical poses—a cousin pretzel, a beached whale with concrete books, a contrite sinner at an arching spinning altar—only to rise again for another lemming march. I cried a war cry, charging my mother like justice riding a hurricane, and, like a hurricane, I dissipated into the atmosphere, suspended over the lake, gazing like a cloud on a slow breeze. Punctuation, transition, and I rained down, a fat drop feeding the lake, fingers grasping for traction at the soft flesh of lake, gaining purchase, surfacing. I was like a chain of storms rising, falling, scrambling onto the beach to be evaporated into another storm of boyish exuberance.

In the evening, my grandfather took me fishing. As I manned my toy fishing pole, he stood over me, a stately giant in tan khaki shorts pull-on loafers and black socks.

The sky was painted in broad strokes of orange and pink evened by a painter's wash, making dark gray silhouettes of an old man and his eldest grandson. Grandpa's hands rested on his waist, big strong hands, great paws built from his father's dairy farm. When I pulled whatever three-inch perch or sunfish out of the lake, he leaned down and gently unhooked the fish, dropping my inedible catch into a colorful plastic bucket half full of lake water. When we were done, he followed as I carried my pole and pail back down the dock, leaning sharply to hold the pail up, sloshing the water onto my hip and the dock underneath, my bare soles slapping the boards twice for every step of his.

On the drive home, I looked for the spot where the rifle must be, still hoping Mom would stop and we could scour the grass looking for my toy. But the Midwestern interstate all looked the same. I concentrated, but any of the gentle bends could have been the one. Any of the thousand identical overpasses could have signaled the resting place of the rifle. And shortly I slept. My rifle is still sitting in that field. It must be mostly reclaimed by now. First, the black enamel cracks like dried mud, then flakes away, baring a heap alloy barrel already festering in rusty patches. Next, cracks surface in the barrel itself like tributaries. Brackets disintegrate, moving parts disengage, springs snap, cranks crust over and metal collapses into rich dust. Eventually, the plastic butt alone remains by some interstate, an artifact of childhood, framed in a blazing green ring of grass.



Peter Jefferis

Fading Stadium Lights

Joshua Lacey

The lights from the old
Field were on that night—
I could see them just outside town

A caged diamond where adolescent
Amateurs battled out rivalries
With sweat-stained ball caps and
Dirt-ridden socks—
Sliding, throwing, swinging
In the young way we knew

But the lights were fading:
First blackening the outfield grass—
Creeping inward like an imminent plague—
Until finally, there were no more bases;
Nothing, nothing but me, eyes closed,
Pointing through black air, waiting—forever—
For the next pitch.

Love Song and Lull in the Drive Thru Coffee Shop

Mercy Gallagher

I would steep and brew with you.

Beside the drive-thru window
(I'm always afraid it will close
On my neck as I lean out—
A guillotine sacrificing minimum-wagers to
The Lord Caffeine)
And by the sticky clutter of syrup bottles
(Which should be in the fridge)
Midnight-tinted ooze
Drips sleepily
From idle machines.

In Tornado Alley,
In mid-America,
In Tulsa, Oklahoma, I'm work-a-day done.
My molly-coddled mary-janes rest mindlessly
On ground espresso mud and grit, all littered on
The cracked plastic tile.
And in my glass box coffee shop, I watch the colored cars
On West 64
Hurtling towards the heaven of the overpass.

I would fly from my drive-thru window
(With a puff of steam cut short
As the glass snapped at my airborne toes)
And I would meet you in the swirling air,
Or on the baking black tar parking lot,
Or the West Coast,
As the busy, grinning, spinning sun
Made weekends out of Wednesday.

The Fast Food Friendship

Benjamin Bowman

Saw him get into the line behind us, carrying up the rear.

Seemed odd at first, malnourished and out of place,
Yet no bother as I take my seat,
Eat my burger and sip my Coke.

Couldn't help but to notice you
Sitting there at your own private table,
In your own private seat
As other individuals filled the restaurant.
Watching with intent
As you bit your sandwich drudgingly,
As men and women took place in line:
Sons and daughters munch fries and slurp sodas
And loving parents make busy conversation about
baseball games.

Mom enjoys her chicken
And dad dips his fries in ketchup.
I stab my side salad
With the cheap plastic fork they gave me
While all along, you stare a blank hole
Through the fries
Struggling to make way to your tongue,
A tedious chore.

Maybe I am the only one
That sees the loneliness in your eyes,
Or the shame and rejection on your face,
So strong that I can almost feel it.
Could tell that you just didn't want to eat alone
But you continue to bring your slight hand to your face,
shaking,
Wiping the leftovers from your beard and lips.

Knew I should keep you company, no matter how
embarrassing
Or self-degrading it would look to the eaters all around
us.

I know all it takes is just one honest attempt at
companionship
To offset one's depressing day,

One individual's gesture of kindness to keep
Away the barrel from one's lobe
Or razor blade from one's nightstand,
But I still care more about my own appearance
Than someone else's well being.
How shameful.

Mom commented on the man sitting at the table by
himself.

"How pitiful.

Such a shame for a man so young; There's definitely
something wrong with him."

Maybe he has AIDS.

The reason for physical deconditioning is of no matter.

The loneliness and pain on your face

As you stare at the empty plate

Is all I need to see.

To whom it may concern,

I apologize for allowing you

To get into your pick-up to drive away

Without taking the initiative

To put my compassion to action.

Rain Forest (Wrangell, Alaska)

Keith Gogan

This forest weeps
Branches bent, brooding
Ferns frowning, dripping
Beneath a sky
That sees shy sun
Only when the mists
Decide to retreat for an hour
Maybe a day
Until they return to give gray body to the air
But here's the secret:
Water is *life*
This rain forest
This clinically-depressed slice of the planet
Laughs a rich, wet, green laugh
The laugh of Life
So dense, so heavy
That only the bear
The salmon
The hemlock
The eagle
Look it in the face
And laugh
With it



JooYoung Park

Spindrift

Nicki Cooper

During spring break 2006, the writer, accompanied by three others, entered the Rio Grande National Forest in Colorado on her first backcountry ski trip, based at a yurt, a simple backcountry shelter without electricity or running water. She and her companions skied to the yurt then made day trips from it into the nearby meadows and mountains.

I once heard a man describe the ocean as a neutral entity; it does not care whether you live or die, nor does it help you with either. The mountains are no different. On the surface, the ocean seems to pose greater threat with its churning swells and monstrous appetite, giving water an impression of predictability. Land is not as revealing. Movement in the wilderness is subtle, requires a trained eye, and will take you by surprise. What appears stable before you will give way, what appears beautiful will sting, and what appears as success may only be achieved through failure. People who say nature provokes no feeling within them have either never experienced it or they are liars.

The ski in was long, too long, plagued with insecurities and exhaustion. When Keith and I finally arrived at the yurt, Laurie and Ron had been waiting for over an hour. The succession of falls, sinking into the fluffy white mess had left me a nauseated basket-case, stumbling, collapsing on the feather-top. With every crushing drop into the icy depths came a fresh wave of shame. My mind screamed, "Quit, go home, cry over your inadequacy, you cannot do this!" Fueling my anger, it only caused me to keep going. These emotions took time to sort, but finally I saw that I was not a failure, but a success through my failure. The

weakness did not define the outcome; the will did. Had the foothills welcomed me without resistance, all that followed would have been gifts in vain.

After a night of recovery, I followed Laurie's freshly cut trail up the peak, carrying a light day pack and wearing a pair of skins on my skis for traction. The spirit of the land pervaded my senses. The mountain unveiled her glory. Virgin snow, dusty powder in the sun's glare and an icy crust in shade, split open, allowing us passage. Her resistance was deep but futile. The tree tops hummed a rustling melody as we cut our way around their grounded trunks. The serenity mocked loneliness as the land stared into my soul and purged my secrets. It is impossible to travel through, observe, and let go; to look is to see the character of God. A master's work reflects his soul. The land holds no fear and no sin; it is flawless in design. For the Lord to say the mountains are but a mere footstool, what then must His Kingdom be like?

When we reached the first plateau of the mountain, the earth allowed us to go no farther. The gusts of wind warned us to descend; nature did not want intruders today. Keith, Laurie, and I took shelter in the arms of a spruce as we plotted the safest course to continue. Using our ski poles to prop us up against the icy blasts, we dashed to the next tree a few feet higher. The mountain's warning was relentless. Blasts of air built white walls between our vision and the earth. The loose surface powder, friend to the skis, swirled around in sparkling abandonment, cleansing the surface of our tracks, further insisting we were not supposed to be there. We heeded her threat and began our descent.

The thick spruce and firs provided welcome shelter from the peak's naked exposure. Limbs straining against the elements, these giant guardians shielded

all. We then headed for the lowlands, cutting trail, a rewarding perversity. The purity of the land yields awe, but the sight of our tracks brought satisfaction. This surface was ours and only ours, as a virgin taken by her betrothed. We stayed in the trees as long as our path would allow, and with a sharp left we faced a valley of crystalline innocence. A hidden center of untainted white, ringed by forest, she lay in silence as a waltz played on her surface. The wind set the tempo as shadows and light danced the tune. Each crescendo whipped flurried snow angels into perilous spins, shrouding the ice while a new waltz began.

I looked at her beauty with envy and relished the thought of interrupting her song. Like a true maiden, she did not mind our intrusion, allowing us to cross with little resistance; she played a grand finale as a parting gift. It was not only I who relished her, but she who delighted in me. We left her with divine compliments and headed up into the trees once more. Meadows peeked shyly through knotted trunks, offering glimpses, beckoning as sirens to come taste of them.

The hour was getting late, and with humble praise we pressed on. Approaching the end, we stopped in a patch of sun to breathe, to absorb all that had been given. The earth had not yet finished her show. As I looked up at the washed-out blue and intrusive sun glare, a thin frazzled cloud passed by, not often seen as more than a wisp, and never praised like its thick curved companions; it honored us, revealing its own hidden design. Slowly sliding by, it painted an oily prism just for a moment, as if to say, "Even I reveal the Creator's majesty." The colors lingered just long enough to burn their impression into the mind's eye and then slipped away without warning, leaving only the blinding white of the sun.

We finished the trail circuit and headed into the yurt. The stretched canvas and lattice framework provided a modest shelter; there was peace in its simplicity. I felt as if the land had stripped my pretenses, cleansed my impurities, renewed my confidence, and humbled my character. I have seen mankind's frantic loss of control and been given a respect for balance. God created this Earth to heal and restore us when we approach it with respect and admiration.

I can't say I would want to be alone here; the cleansing is too deep. In time, I hope to face the wilderness with courage, secure that I will not find buried regrets and fears, but for now, I am grateful for the friends who understand the process and nourished me in the experience. It leaves you raw, but they have kept me sane.

And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.
—John 1:16

Comenzando / Beginning

Ana Maria Correa

La niña se concentra.
El lápiz atraviesa la página
despaciosamente,
esperando ante
una puerta cerrada.

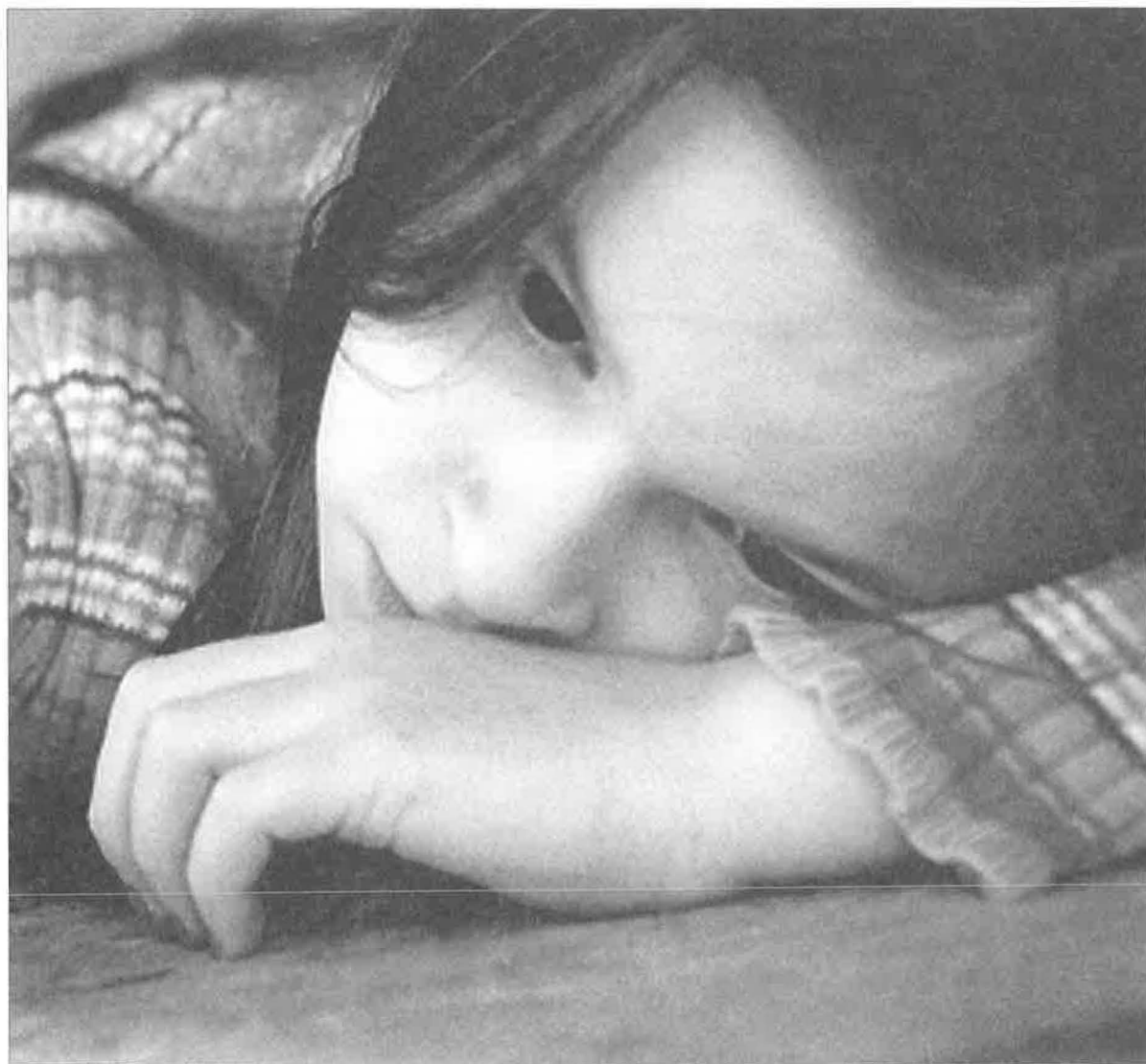
Sus pequeños dedos
aprietan madera y grafito
con la tenacidad
de una araña
hilando su tela.

El mundo existe
en estos minutos,
en el contacto
de piel,
sangre
y
papel.

The child concentrates.
A pencil traverses the page
slowly,
waiting before
a locked door.

Her small fingers
grip wood and graphite
with the tenacity
of a spider
spinning her web.

The world exists
in these minutes,
in the contact
of skin,
blood,
and
paper.



Peter Jefferis

Sunday

Jennifer Westbrook

Sunday comes more quickly than Friday,
Bringing with her the ringing of bells in churches with pews;
The clinging of change in gold dishes
Passed around.
"Blessed be the name of the Lord
From this time forth and forevermore!"
Sang David of this God:
Whose hand is made of fire in churches with choirs,
And fingers drip of chocolate in those of flashing lights.

Sunday comes more quickly than Friday,
Bringing with her the promise of a setting sun
And then Monday
And Tuesday
And Wednesday.
But surely Friday comes like the first warm breeze,
Promising freedom from the cold and bleak
Bareness of trees.
Saturday smiles and begs to be chased;
Runs like a child into the soft arms of
Mother Sunday.
Beautiful Sunday:
With bells and dishes and chocolate hands
And promises never broken.

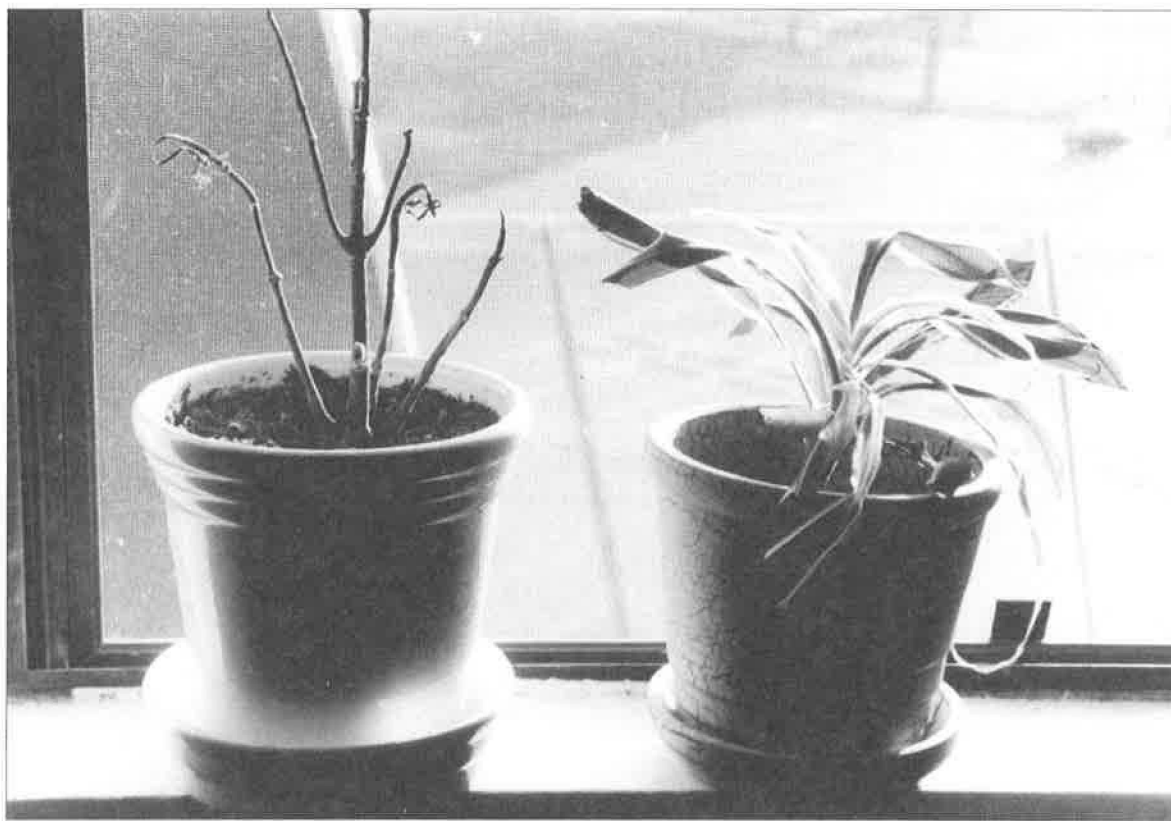
Porches

Joshua Lacey

Even on a strange and cold porch,
With the arch of your back and your
Shoulder blades twitching against my chest,
My forehead and nose mashing into your temple,
I felt at home

Even with a bitter, unforgiving wind
Chipping away at our reddened cheeks,
My chin nestling in the basin of
Your right clavicle,
I felt at home

And now tucked in safety between
Superman-colored sheets and quilt,
Six unwavering walls, central heating dancing
I can't help wondering if I will
Ever feel home again



Kimberly Smith

What is a Mountain?

Keith Gogan

What is a mountain?
Webster could help us here
But he knows only ink and pulp
Not bulk
Of granite
Attic of the world
Precursor to paradise
Windswept un-Purgatory
Where we all can get a taste
Of that land halfway between
Diet Coke
And God

The Hunter

Thomas Bellatti

The cool, gray October sky disappeared behind a warm, mottled canopy of oak and hickory leaves as I drove down the narrow dirt road that leads to my grandmother's house. I was going hunting, and my anticipation was soaring. The previous day's rain coupled with the slight north breeze had made the conditions perfect for stirring up the deer. "Perhaps I might see a real trophy today," I thought as I drove. My new .54-caliber muzzleloader was "driving tacks." Yes indeed, the day was quite promising. The only thing that could possibly quell my excitement on such a happy, gray day was the obligatory visit I had to make to my grandmother's. It was her ranch after all; she had gotten it from her father. The least I could do was pop in and see her for a second before I ventured out into my sanctuary. But she was such an eccentric woman. No one was really close to her, and the smell of her cigarettes would get on my clothes and blow my cover. Ah, the price we must pay for a good place to hunt.

The canopy gave way to gray again as I entered the tight clearing where her house stands. My grandfather had had this house custom built to her specifications after he retired. He had said, "Some women are born with the desire to build and decorate houses. Your grandmother was conceived with that desire." He was right. Every detail of her home reeked of perfection and order. As I pulled my white 4 x 4 underneath the massive limestone portico, the bright red double entry doors swung open. There stood my granddad in his uniform of faded Levi's and old-timey, square-toed cowboy boots. "Come in, Tom," he said with a broad sweeping motion of his left arm. "Your Bubbah will be

out soon." I knowingly acknowledged him with a nod and wry little half smile. He and I sat in his office and talked while awaiting her entrance.

The grand moment arrived mercifully. "Hello, so nice of you to stop by!" she dramatically greeted me. She was done up as if they were going out, perfect makeup and perfect hair. Her dozen or so pieces of jewelry perfectly complemented her conservatively elegant dress. Shoot, even her cigarette holder matched her outfit. It was hard to imagine that she had once been a tomboy hunting and playing in these same woods. She knew my visit would be brief and got right to the point: "Where will you be hunting today?" she asked. I described a ridge that ran a half-mile or so west of the house there. "Oh, God is back there," she casually retorted. Her reply sucked all the pleasure from the remainder of my stay and is indelibly etched in my memory. My mind immediately went into overdrive: "What in the world did she know about God?" She wasn't exactly "church folk," and I was doing my dead-level best not to be, either. Four years removed from my parents' house, I had determined to steer clear of all things religious. We visited a little longer, and she graciously dismissed me to my hunt.

The woods had become the place and the thing that I had come to worship. Their warmth and solitude were my refuge. At the young age of 22, I still thought the kill was what made my trips to the woods so fulfilling. It certainly would not be so on this day. I was haunted by grandmother's comment about God. I certainly didn't want Him to mess up my hunt. The day dragged on, and I didn't see anything worth shooting. As the light waned, I turned eastward away from the pale amber remnant of day toward the blue twilight of evening. Surely, I had escaped all danger of encountering the Almighty.



JooYoung Park

The road home from the hunt was always long, about twenty miles, and especially lonely if you hadn't had any luck. I had mischievously made it a habit on these trips to stop at a little country store at about the halfway point and buy a six-pack. This evening was no different. Less than a mile removed from the store, I started to crack open one of those beers. Suddenly, the entire cab of my pickup became heavily warm. Not the warmth from the heater but a tangible, enveloping, living warmth. Love was pursuing me. Peace surrounded me. I had to stop my truck. There in the darkness on a lonely, obscure, Oklahoma section-line road, God had come to me. While I felt the shame of what I was doing, He was not condemning. He was merely impressing upon me that He loved me and that He wanted me to take better care of myself. That was all. After a while, I could drive again.

That night would come to have a profound effect on

me. There I discovered that there is no limit to God. He is not limited in what He can do or the lengths will go to make Himself known to us. He can never be confined to man-made structures or religion. Finite religion could never hope to encompass the enormity of His majesty and love. Amazingly, in all His greatness, He is more than willing to meet us right where we are. For the apostle Paul, it was on his way to kill more Christians. For my grandmother, it was on a heavily wooded ridge. For me, it was in a pickup on a dirt road drinking beer. That day the hunter became the hunted. He hunts not to bring death but to give the crown of life. While it took me years to realize it, I did in fact gain quite a trophy that day.

To a Militant Papaw

Joshua Lacey

I was young and free of fear
Until I knew my Pa-paw.
Deep down, I wanted to hear stories
Of missions and explosions from the war,
But he told me about Jesus
Instead, saying, "not this time."

But over time,
I withdrew from him for fear
I would only hear about Jesus'
Wrath, rather than know my Pa-paw.
But because he served in the war,
He was militant and there was no place for stories.

All he talked about were stories
From the Bible and science during our time
Together, while I made war
With action figures and trucks, fearing
The moment my eager Pa-paw
Would try to save me with the blood of Jesus.

"It's not enough to accept Jesus
And believe all the miraculous stories,"
Would say my cold and long-faced Pa-paw.
"It takes devotion and lots of time
To become a person who fears
God. Don't you want to fight in the war?"

I was only eight; what war
Was there to fight for Jesus
At eight? "Devotion and fear
Are not for an eight-year-old, only stories
And games can pass the time,"
I wanted to tell my Pa-paw.

But even if I did, my Pa-paw
Wouldn't listen, because he was hardened by the war
And grew more cold with time.
All he knew about was science and Jesus;
That's all he wanted to know about, not stories
Or games; he was full of fear.

One day, I think I will be with Jesus and Pa-paw,
And I'm sure there will be no time for fear:
Only stories of war.



Daniel Folkers

Thicker than Water

Jason Glover

"Quick!" shouted Logan, over his shoulder. "We are going to be late for the plane."

"Hey! Don't blame me; you were the one who forgot his ticket," replied David. They were racing through the LAX airport, frantically searching for their gate. "Do you know how much I am going to have to hurt you if we missed our flight?"

"Come on, Gate C-19 is over here," Logan responded hurriedly. He wouldn't have normally let his younger brother push him around, but he was too stressed about making the flight to think up a good come-back.

"There it is! We made it," David announced.

They arrived in time to board with the rest of Coach. "This is so exciting. I can't believe we are actually going to Australia," David panted.

"I know. It will be so nice to see Esther again," replied Logan. Their sister had moved to Sydney with her new husband, William, only six months earlier. He had gotten a job there painting murals for a big corporation. Logan and David hadn't seen them since the wedding, almost a year ago.

"I just wish we didn't have to fly," Logan quipped.

"We don't have time to sail there. Look, I know you're scared of flying, but everything is going to be fine," David replied reassuringly.

"I am not scared; I just don't like airplanes; that's all," Logan insisted.

They were now getting seated. They were sandwiched between an elderly woman and a big Samoan in a sleeveless shirt that revealed his tribal tattoos.

As the stewardess was explaining safety exits and seat belts, Logan sat quietly with a vice-like grip on his arm-rests.

"This your first time flying, honey?" The voice next

to him was gentle and cracked a little at the end.

Logan turned his head to look down at the little, frail woman. "How did you know?" he asked, a little embarrassed.

"Oh, I can just tell about these sorts of things. There is nothing to fear, dear. I've flown lots of times. Used to be a stewardess, back, probably, before you were born," she said with a smile.

He tried to smile back, but something in his stomach would not unclench.

They had been on the emergency raft for six days. David figured they had been in the air for about twelve hours when they had what he thought was just turbulence. He couldn't remember what the pilot had tried to say over the intercom when the air masks dropped. What he did remember was how scared he had been.

As David sat, baking in the yellow rubber raft, he figured it must have been some sort of storm that brought the plane down. Yes, that was it. He started to recall seeing lightning out the window just before the plane started shaking like a baby's rattle. What he couldn't remember was how he got on the vessel. He slowly turned his thoughts on his only companion in the raft. It was Logan.

David was remembering a time from their childhood. They were about four or five years old and were playing in the yard after a storm. They had gotten into a fight over who would wear the black hat which belonged to Logan. And as boys do, they started wrestling in the muddy turf. The only reason David remembered it so well, was that when their mother had seen them in the mud, like little pigs in a sty; instead of breaking them up, she ran the half-block to their grandparents' house, for the camera. The pictures

depicted the story perfectly. Initially, the boys were unaware that they were being photographed. Logan, with his straight hair matted to his forehead, and cartoon under-eyes showing, is pushing David's face in a puddle. Gradually, the boys, still locked in an embrace, look up to see their mother and smile through their muddy faces.

Logan had been sleeping a lot since they got on their little boat. His lips were cracked and his skin was pale and dry. David's own skin was red and looked hot, like roasted meat.

He sat with his back to the raft's edge. His right arm lay over the side, floating in the water. He had tried to nurse his brother the first couple of days in their little vessel, but, now, he was too tired. He was fading in and out of consciousness. He had begun to lose track of time. When he was awake all he could think about was how thirsty he was and how hot it was. He kept telling himself not to drink any more water, but he couldn't help himself. His throat was itching again. Just another sip, he thought. He started to black out again...

Then, he saw something on the horizon, something different than the flatness everywhere else. As the raft rose and dipped, he squinted his eyes to see the shape of land.

It couldn't be! Land! He gathered all his strength and began to paddle toward the direction of the image. The current was carrying him toward the island, but he was too excited to wait. His eyes burned, trying to see it more clearly.

When he finally touched shore, it was twilight. He stumbled out of the raft, so grateful for his salvation. He wanted to cry, but his tear ducts had dried up, and

his lips were cracked with blood, so that he could barely open his mouth. With some effort, he dragged Logan out of the raft and brought him further inland.

The next morning, David felt his spirits lift. He tried to raise himself and was surprised to discover that he had renewed strength in his limbs. He was still very thirsty, but the thought that he might find a fresh water spring brought hope to him.

For the first time, he began to survey his surroundings. He was on a sandy beach. There was a dense tree line about fifty yards from where he stood and his raft was still moored about twenty yards behind him. The shape he saw the night before was actually the outline of a small mountain, which he could see above the treetops. Its form dominated the landscape and its quiet frame comforted David.

"Like a lighthouse. My own lighthouse, drawing me to safety. And, hopefully, I will be able to find some fresh water."

After procuring some branches, he erected them to shade his brother's withered body. Somehow, he remembered him being taller than that. Must have been the journey, he thought.

Now, he set off toward the mountain. Certainly, there will be a spring running off from it, and maybe I can get a coconut or something to transport the water, he thought.

As he began his expedition, he noticed that the trees and foliage here were different than what he had ever seen before. As he neared the forest, he noticed how tall everything was. The trees were twice as tall as the palms he had seen in California. But they weren't palms. They were a hardwood with very dark bark. Their branches started about ten feet off the ground and were so numerous and intertwined, that once he got in the wood, they nearly blocked out the Sun. The trees were all close together and the underbrush was full and bushy

like a rabbit's tail. The few patches of ground in between the brush made a very narrow and winding path. He could no longer see the sky now. Except for the few rays of light piercing through to the forest floor, he could not tell that it was day at all.

A sudden thought struck him; What if I don't make it back before night fall? There is no way that I could find my way out at night; it would be pitch black. He shuddered, but tried to push the thought out of his mind as he quickened his pace.

He paused after a couple of hours to catch his breath and get his bearings. He looked all around and then listened carefully. He was startled by the realization that all this time, there had been no noises. No birds calling, no monkeys jumping through the trees. Except for the distant roar of the ocean and the sound of his own labored breath, there was nothing to be heard. He suddenly felt very alone.

He started up again, trekking strenuously through the labyrinth, trying to find his way out the other side. Somehow, the whole experience reminded him of a dream he had once had, although when he awoke, he could not remember it. He was beginning to fear that he would never reach the mountain when he tripped on a loose rock and cut his right palm when he fell. He couldn't see the cut very well, but it hurt a lot. He couldn't seem to get it to stop bleeding. Yet, as he looked up, he saw through the trees the base of the mountain: his mountain. He let his hand fall to his side, not caring if it bled. I only need reach the mountain and everything will be alright, he thought. As he emerged from the wood, he saw the mountain rising before him. It was dusk, and purple clouds had formed around it, making its

imposing image look ominous. He paused for a moment, and then set his face to conquer his Goliath.

He decided to go around it, to the right, to where it met the sea. He had not gone far when he was stopped by a sharp drop-off. He was standing on top of a cliff, directly over the water. He thought about going back, the other way, when he saw a cave near the water's edge. Something about the cave called to him. Maybe it was the boy in him who always had wanted to find the buried treasure, but there was some irresistible urge in him to find out where the cave led. Carefully, he made his descent. It was getting very dark. Yet he could still see, somehow. There was a faint glow coming from somewhere.

Finally, he made it to a landing which seemed to extend all the way to where the cave was nestled. He crept his way around; the ledge was only a couple of feet wide, and the rocks twenty feet below, scattering the ocean's bed, did not look inviting. As he approached the cave, he realized that the light which had guided him safely to the cave was actually radiating from within. It was a soft glow and did not illuminate the entire cavern, only the path before him. He could not see the walls to his right or his left. He couldn't see how deep it was either, but the urging within him only grew stronger the closer he came, so that by now there was no turning back. His footsteps echoed through the hall, like those of the last actor leaving the theater. As he drew further in, the light continued to subtly guide his footsteps.

Not being able to see well, David kept his ears open, desperately searching his surroundings for anything which might jump out at him from the darkness. Yet, for all his efforts, all he could hear was his own breath and

muffled footsteps and the ever-decreasing sound of the sea at his back. The further he went in, the further he went up, ascending through the cave as if on a spiraling stairway in a mansion. No matter how far he went, he could never see beyond the light at his feet, and could never tell of the dimensions of his cave.

At length, he felt a breeze blow on his face and knew that he was close to the end of his search. He began to run, and in his haste, he fell, once more. As he landed on his hands and knees, the pain from his right hand reminded him that it was still bleeding, and he wished greatly to be able to see the extent of the damage. He quickly but more carefully emerged from the cave, only to find himself at the peak of the mountain.

As David stood, doubled over, trying to catch his breath, he looked around surveying the area. He was standing in a small grassy meadow, completely surrounded by a rock wall, with the stars overhead. He had finally begun to advance when he saw something peculiar.

Over, at one side of the little clearing, he saw a small fire. He suddenly became aware of how cold he was, and perhaps had always been, and made a dash for it. But just as he neared the fire, something in the shadows moved. David abruptly halted and strained his eyes to see what was there. A figure shrouded in a dark cloak rose out of the shadows. The figure stood at his full height, towering above David. He was not like any man he had seen. He was a giant in size and his countenance was stern and fearsome. His cloak was wrapped around him and his face, from under the hood stared, unflinching directly at David. He could not speak, he could not move, he could not breath...

"Who goes there?" the voice boomed.

"I am, um...my name is David," he replied without thinking.

"Why have you come?" he demanded.

"I...I...saw a light," David tried to explain.

"And what were you searching for?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes!" For the first time David remembered his brother on the beach and how he had set out to retrieve water for him. Then, slowly, he became aware of himself. He was no longer thirsty, and his hand no longer hurt. He thought of Esther, and wished that he could have seen her one more time. He remembered how Logan looked when he left him.

"He is dead, isn't he?" David asked, nearly in tears.

"Do not be afraid. You will see him shortly," he said. And with a motion of his hand he beckoned; "Come."

The rescue teams found the raft floating in the middle of the sea. There were no supplies on board, only a small flashlight in the middle, and a smudged, bloody handprint on the side of the raft. Logan's body was alone.

Dead Woman's Garden

Joann Furlow Allen

A cat sits in the dead woman's garden,
A sentry in the silence.

Amid the floral offerings of withered hands,
Born from love, die unnoticed.

Among the vegetables, planted with hope,
Harvested only by thieves.

A cat sleeps in the dead woman's garden,
Unmindful of the ghosts--

Of bygone springs and forgotten lives,
Of bent old bodies and lonely, late-summer's end.

Porch Talks (in the spirit of the villanelle)

Mary Alice Trent

On the front porch bench I sat with Daddy,
Chuckling until our bellies ached from laughing,
Often tears of unspeakable joy filled up in my eyes.

Sometimes, we'd listen to the buzzing sound of a busy bee.
Or, we'd be enchanted by the conversations of birds chirping.
On the front porch bench I sat with Daddy.

Sweet smells of succulent nectar paraded about me.
Aroma from Jazzy Jasmine came around my nose dancing.
Often tears of unspeakable joy filled up in my eyes.

Hanging out on the porch with Daddy, I was flamboyant and free.
There were no restraints on the topics of our talking;
On the front porch bench I sat with Daddy.

At times, the kaleidoscopic colors of a rainbow were all I could see.
On the ground ants strategically were moving about their colony and scurrying.
Often tears of unspeakable joy filled up in my eyes.

These memories are but frames in my mind, where I am again happy.
Still, my heart rejoices that he is no longer in the Land of the Dying.
On the front porch I sat with Daddy.
Often tears of unspeakable joy filled up in my eyes.

*Previously appeared in **In Other Words** by the Western Reading Series: Denver, Colorado, October 2005.*

Broadsided (Katrina 2005)

Keith Gogan

Who'd have thought
Lady Katy
Cyclops swirling on a hot blue stage
Could leave a Chrysler floating
In no-wheel-drive
Past a restaurant
Itself abandoned
Its beignet boats bumping into table three?

Who'd have thought
People—yes, people
Would erupt onto rooftops
Human antennas awaiting a signal
That too often came too late?

Who'd have thought
Earl, age 92
Would lie and die
In street heat
In front of the party supply store
Starry streamers and paper hats
Peering out through broken glass?

Who'd have thought
An army of saints
Would go marching out
Not wanting to be in that number
That would never again see home?

Superhero: Modern Women Grab Your Maybelline

Mercy Gallagher

Twenty-first century vixen
That I am,
I can do anything—
A bubble gum girl
Superhero.

I am not afraid when you
Gamely flip through magazines
To find your
Sexy sparkle
Apple lip gloss
Ad girl
Complete with Kool-Aid waterfall.
(A feast for hearts
And a hearts of palm luncheon!).

Wow, think:
I could be your
Coca Cola, Motorola roller rink,
Almond steamer
Cream dream
Zebra head buzz baby.

Or something.

Maybe I could be anything,
Here with my feet propped on the bathtub,
These ten blue toenails over the
Corroding metal stopper,
Its trail of rust seeping, creeping
Towards the drain



Daniel Folkers

The Winged Footed Physic

Roger Buswell

Light behaves like a wave
Sometimes.
Light behaves like a molecule
Sometimes.
Light bends around objects,
Attracted to mass,
Thirsty for company.

Light is, to some degree, present in the
far reaches of the known universe.
Light makes the universe known.

Light,
According to some prominent mind,
Is like a speed limit for speed.

What a creature.
What a steed; what a worker.
What a winged-footed messenger.

If light were a man, Apollo (Speedy on
the playground),
I think I would like to know him,
To know a man who could splash over
me, lifting me,
Emerging me,
Pulling me from void,
Pulling me from dissipation.

To converse in coruscation, to speak in
sparkles,
With him,
While he falls in freeze frames,
Flowing in flowers of wavelength.
Tight lipped in violet, loose talking in
red.

I would not want to walk with him,
Always on his way and standing,
Because, according to some prominent
mind,
I would have to expand to infinite
volume,
I would have to clothe my infinite bulk,
I would have to consume worlds to
strengthen my bones,
Now of infinite length.

However, Apollo could nod and wink
knowingly on his way past,
And through.

Someday my physics will allow me to
take a stroll with light.

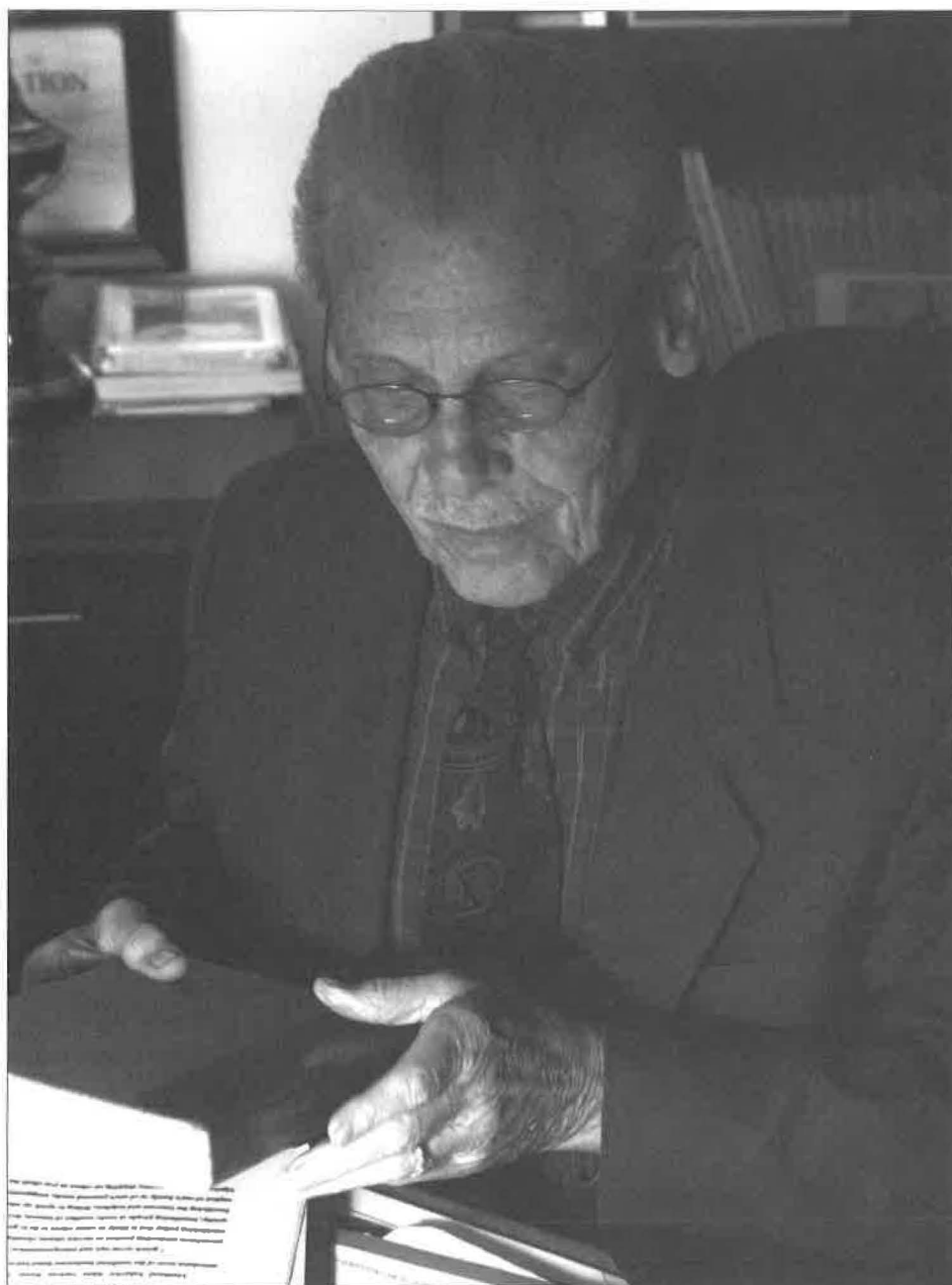
Excerpt from Gallery of the Grotesque

A Gothic Novel set in Western Oklahoma

Grady Walker

As I let myself out that morning and slipped away from the rest of the family, my little body was tingling with excitement. I had a nickel to spend, and I had all the rest of the Western Star to explore. The dust had settled on everything like an Egyptian plague, dead and deadly, waiting to be whipped into action again with the lightest breeze. But the air was still as death. In fact, I seemed to be the only thing alive in the Western Star Tourist Courts, and I was moving. First, I rushed to the backside of that impressive encampment and examined the embattled wall of tumbleweeds caught on the barbed wire fence. It was as marvelous to me as the Great Wall of China would have been and was just as impenetrable. After that wonder, I made my way to the center of this castellated city of white shacks and discovered yet another marvel: the bath house. I might as well have been entering Solomon's new temple. I had never seen anything like this. Rows of open showers and benches on which sit or lay one's clothing. I could tell there was another side just like this one, so I figured one side must be for women, the other side for men. I didn't know which side I was on. The walls were made of tin or some kind of metal, and there were narrow slits of windows of windows at the top. Water pipes ran zig-zag and criss-cross up the wall, and all of the shower heads were leaking. What an

adventure I could have here. I immediately discovered a light switch by the door and flipped it on. Nothing happened. I tried again and again. Then an idea struck me. Maybe the light bulb needed to be tightened. Immediately, my bare feet plowed through the standing water on the floor, and like a monkey, I was climbing the pipes. My goal was the inoperative light bulb. When I got high enough to reach it, I held onto the pipes with one hand, planted my feet solidly on the wet pipes beneath me and stretched as far as I could to set things right with the light bulb. Being a poor physical scientist, I still don't know what happened in that instant. There was a flash, and it seemed as if blue electricity sizzled through every nerve of my body. The next thing I knew, I was hanging upside down, just for an instant with my feet stuck to the wet pipes. As my feet came loose from the pipes, and I crumpled in a heap on the puddled floors, I knew I had been electrocuted and wondered if I was dead. As my senses came back I opened one eye, I discovered my face was on the floor and blood was mingling with the water of a great puddle very close to my face. Slowly, the nerves in that eye brought the message to my stunned brain that across that little bloody sea lay my nickel that had fallen from my pocket and was now teetering dangerously on the edge of an open shower drain.



Roger Buswell



Peter Jefferis

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